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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT SPEAKER URGES USG TO "GIVE HAMAS A
CHANCE"

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

(C) In a February 6 meeting with the Ambassador, National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi argued that Hamas' election "could be a blessing in disguise" and repeatedly urged the USG to "give democracy a chance." He said the election presented a "unique opportunity for a peaceful resolution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and claimed Hamas, if it agreed to negotiate, could "sell" any peace deal it reached with Israel, whereas Fatah could not. Al-Khorafi encouraged the U.S. to let Hamas form a government and take real political responsibility; being in leadership is much more difficult than being in opposition, he observed. Once in power Hamas would be forced to seek peace with Israel or risk losing essential "facilities" provided by the Israelis and angering the Palestinian people, Al-Khorafi claimed. Insisting that the U.S. should "give Hamas a chance," he said, "I don't think you have another option." The Ambassador noted that the USG had been very clear under what conditions it would deal with Hamas and that the "opportunity" presented by Hamas' election depended on Hamas' willingness to alter its policies. Meanwhile, he said, we are taking steps to address the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people and encourage our friends like Kuwait to help as well.

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LeBaron